

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394

Articles in Today's Clips

Monday, August 11, 2008

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Audit	2
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	3-5
Domestic Violence	6-8
Migrant Workers	9-12
Health Care	13-19
Food Assistance	20--21
Charities	22-23
State Budget	24

* Important Story

Grand Rapids Press Letters

August 9, 2008

Taking care with kids

The July 22, release of the Auditor General's Performance Audit that reviewed Department of Human Services (DHS) practices from 2003 to 2006 was certainly a serious matter for every one concerned with the well being of children in Michigan ("State overlooked 1,900 convicts in day care jobs," Press, July 23).

It is heartening to know that DHS revised its criminal background check procedures for child care providers in April 2007. We can be proud that in Kent County over 35 licensed and registered child care programs have gone the extra mile to become nationally accredited, and more are in the process. National accreditation is one of the best measures of quality available today. The standards of accreditation focus on staff qualifications, interactions between staff, children and families, and planned curriculum for the children.

The child care system in Michigan is critical to working families and we need to do everything we can to ensure that quality, health and safety are maintained in all child care programs, including those that are not required to be licensed or registered such as DHS subsidized relative and aide providers.

It is encouraging to know that DHS continues to work hand-in-hand with Michigan legislators to improve child care quality and safety. As concerned parents and adults we must insist that the state intensify its efforts to develop a system of quality child care that is accountable and provides parents with real and meaningful choices.

-- DEB VanderMOLEN

Executive Director

Kent Regional 4C

Grand Rapids

Amber Alert: Detroit boy, mother abducted by father

BY TAMMY STABLES BATTAGLIA • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER •
AUGUST 11, 2008

An Amber Alert has been issued for a 2-year-old boy police say was abducted at gunpoint with his mother in Detroit late Sunday night by his father.

Last seen wearing a red shirt and a diaper, 2-year-old Zayshawn Diggs is described as 3 feet tall, weighing 30 pounds with black hair, black skin and brown eyes.

Akeem Lafabhili, 22, took the boy and his mother, Racheal Latoshia Diggs, at 11:45 p.m. Sunday from the 8900 block of Vaughn on Detroit's northwest side, Detroit Police Sgt. Eren Stephens Bell said. The boy's mother had left Lafabhili last week, and police had responded to a domestic violence complaint involving the couple in June, Bell said.

Police said Lafabhili is a 5-foot 8-inch tall man, weighing 170 pounds with black hair, brown eyes and wearing a white hooded sweatshirt. They were last seen in a green 1996 four-door Chevrolet Impala, police said.

Anyone with information about the situation can call Detroit Police Department Domestic Violence at 313-833-9813.



Monday, August 11, 2008

Amber Alert: 2-year-old boy missing along with mother

Tom Greenwood / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- The Detroit Police Department has issued an Amber Alert for a missing two-year-old boy whose mother also is reportedly missing.

According to Detroit News reporting partner WXYZ-TV (Channel 7), the mother and son were last seen just before midnight Sunday. Detroit police suspect Rachell Latoshia Diggs, 22, and her son were kidnapped by Akeem Lafabhili, who has been identified as the boy's father.

Diggs is described as a 5-foot-1, 135-pound African Americana who has a tattoo on her right arm. She was last seen wearing an orange shirt, jeans and white shoes. The baby boy was wearing a red shirt and diaper.

Police describe Lafabhili, 22, as Middle Eastern. He is 5-foot-8 and 170 pounds with brown eyes and black hair. He was wearing a white hooded sweatshirt and is believed to be driving a green 1996 Chevrolet Impala.

If you have seen any of these individuals, call Detroit police at (313) 833-9813.

You can reach Tom Greenwood at (313) 222-2023 or tgreenwood@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080811/METRO01/808110391>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

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Police investigate death of 2-year-old Manistee-area boy

Posted by [The Grand Rapids Press](#)

August 11, 2008 08:50AM

MANISTEE COUNTY -- State police this morning are investigating the death of a 2-year-old boy who was found unresponsive in bed.

Rescuers attempted cardiopulmonary resuscitation before the boy was taken to West Shore Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead.

Police had responded to the 2:20 a.m. call at of an unresponsive child at his parents' village of Stronach home. No names were released. An autopsy is being scheduled, and police continue to investigate.

Man stabbed, woman arrested in Grand Rapids

Posted by [The Grand Rapids Press](#)

August 11, 2008 05:48AM

A 27-year-old man was stabbed in the chest in a domestic dispute on Worden Street SE late Sunday, and police arrested a woman at the scene.

The man's injuries in the 10:30 p.m. stabbing, at a home in the 1100 block of Worden, were not considered life-threatening, police said.

Police did not immediately know what spurred the assault. The victim was taken to Spectrum Health Butterworth Hospital for treatment.



New law is another tool to fight domestic abuse

GUEST OPINION

BETH MORRISON - President and CEO of HAVEN, a nationally recognized nonprofit, based in Pontiac.
Special to The Oakland Press

Michigan now has another tool for the court system to track and monitor domestic violence perpetrators and stalkers.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm recently signed a new law allowing GPS monitoring of both suspects awaiting trial, those convicted and those released on parole.

In some jurisdictions in Michigan, GPS tethers have already been in use, often with positive outcomes and success. With any new law, implementation is the key. This particular legislation leaves open many unanswered questions as to how to implement while ensuring victim's safety, rights and privacy.

At HAVEN, we support this measure with a dose of caution -- technology doesn't always work. When I am Up North at our family cottage we only have cell phone coverage if we are in a particular spot on the lake, facing a certain direction and praying for one bar to show up on the phone.

Not much GPS protection there. So if I were a domestic violence victim who may also need to wear a device, do I have to give up my northern getaway spot to be safe?

GPS monitoring will not stop an individual from storming through his expartner's front door and killing her -- all the buzzers and bells and whistles will not stop that from happening.

But GPS monitoring will work if the first time he stalks and harasses her, the system swoops in and swiftly applies appropriate consequences. That currently doesn't happen even with those individuals holding a Personal Protection Order. We have heard countless stories of a PPO being violated literally dozens of times before the court intervenes.

GPS monitoring, tethers, PPO's, probation, batterer's intervention programming -- all of these are simply tools. Domestic violence professionals will tell you that batterer accountability is the most effective tool to minimize the risk of revictimization.

And all players in the system -- law enforcement, prosecution, court personnel, judges, probation/parole, batterer's intervention programs and victim services -- must work together with one goal in mind -- victim safety.

That means holding the batterer to a high level of accountability for each and every action. Let's not forget -- it is the system's duty to hold a batterer accountable, not the victim.

So, if you are a victim of domestic violence, consider this new law another tool that you can add to your list. We encourage you to work with a domestic violence advocate/counselor to fully explore all options and to put together a comprehensive safety plan. You can contact us at HAVEN at (877) 922-1274.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/081108/opi_20080811379.shtml

Southwest Michigan farmers have plenty of help in the fields this summer

Posted by [Chris Killian | Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette](#)

August 10, 2008



Francisco Mixtega-Jara, left, a migrant worker from Mexico, stands in line to weigh the pails of blueberries he picked at Leduc's Blueberries in Paw Paw. There are enough migrant workers this year to harvest the summer crops for Southwest Michigan, especially for blueberries, farmers and the Michigan Department of Labor say.

SOUTH HAVEN -- In recent years, Mike DeGrandchamp struggled at times to find enough hands to pick the fresh blueberries that make their way onto customers' breakfast cereals and fruit plates.

But not this year.

Migrant workers who might have hoped to work construction and landscaping jobs that have dried up as a result of the sour economy are flocking to harvesting jobs, which farmers in the region have had a hard time filling in recent years, state officials say.



Mark Bugnaski | Kalamazoo Gazette

Omar Uribe, 13, a migrant worker from Florida, harvests blueberries at Luduc's Blueberries in Paw Paw. Uribe picked blueberries for the first time last year and said he can pick up to 250 pounds of blueberries a day. There are enough migrant workers this year to harvest the summer crops for Southwest Michigan, especially for blueberries, farmers and the Michigan Department of Labor say.

"There is definitely a more robust supply of workers than in past years," said DeGrandchamp, a partner in DeGrandchamp Farms, which operates a 130-acre blueberry farm near South Haven. "There is a more than adequate supply."

In recent years, because there weren't enough laborers, the farm used machines more than usual to harvest the fruit. But DeGrandchamp said blueberry farmers who sell on the fresh market want to be hand-picked because the fruit can be sold for more money.

This year, the farm employs almost 150 workers in picking and processing operations, "more than enough," he said.

In 2006, the most recent year for which data are available, blueberries were the No. 1 fruit in the state in terms of value of production.

Blueberries brought in \$139 million, said Mark Longstroth, Michigan State University Extension District Horticulture and Marketing Agent for Southwest Michigan.

Statewide, there are about 15,000 migrant farm workers picking fruit this year, said Rick Olivarez, state monitor advocate with the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

"That's the highest number we've seen in years," he said.

Longstroth said the state actually began to see an increase in the number of farm laborers last year, with some of them driving to different farms asking for work, something that "hasn't happened in at least a half-dozen years."

Couple the rise in additional migrant workers with those who come back annually and "this year there's an abundance again," he said.

Officials with Olivarez's agency travel annually to Texas to lobby migrant farm workers to come to Michigan for the harvest season, which runs from April to October.

The trips have been "very helpful" in persuading workers to come to the state, which offers myriad social services to migrant farm laborers and their families, including medical, dental and educational services.

If the positive results continue, Michigan could become one of the top five destination states in the country for migrant farm labor, Olivarez said.

The state tries to find local residents to work in the harvest, Olivarez said, but "even if we do, they don't last that long.

"The crops wouldn't be picked if it wasn't for migrant farm labor," he said. Still, challenges remain.

Olivarez was told by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials that the government agency -- which enforces federal immigration laws -- would be focusing on finding undocumented workers in three industries this year: agriculture, hotels and landscaping.

Two years ago, a federal immigration crackdown may have kept many workers away, and growers of all kinds reported shortages of pickers.

Chantal Leduc, of Leduc Blueberries, hopes their workers aren't targeted.

"They're like family to us," she said. "We need their skilled labor."

Leduc said people get mad when she says it, but "(local) people won't do this kind of work."

Her farm employs about 150 to 170 migrant farm workers, most of whom come to work on the farm year after year. They shouldn't be afraid of being rounded up by federal agents, Leduc said.

"We need to protect these guys," she said.

Backers of health plan tax submit signatures to put measure on the ballot

Posted by [Crystal McMorris | Bay City Times Writer](#)

August 09, 2008 06:01AM

Bay County voters likely will decide in November whether to fund the Bay Health Plan, which advocates say would provide much-needed health care services to "uninsured and underinsured" residents of Bay County.

Supporters turned in petitions with 4,541 signatures calling for placing the initiative on the Nov. 4 ballot.

County officials have said that more than 3,200 signatures would have to be collected by Aug. 12, including 4 percent of registered voters in every city and township in Bay County.

Bay County Clerk Cynthia A. Luczak has until Aug. 26 to review and certify the signatures.

"This is an important milestone for working families in Bay County who are struggling to get access to quality, affordable health care," said Linda Hamacher, executive directors of the plan, in a press release.

If approved, the plan would levy 0.67 mills for eight years on Bay County homeowners to fund a "basic health service delivery system for the prevention and treatment of health problems of uninsured and underinsured residents of the county."

The plan would raise \$2 million the first year and would continue until 2015. The Bay County Commission voted 6-3 against putting the issue on the ballot, with some commissioners saying they preferred the issue come to the public via referendum.

Although proponents have called it a plan for working families, nothing in the language of the proposal requires recipients to have jobs or families, but they must be residents of the county.

"Most of the recipients would be working families," Hamacher said on

Friday. "Some people think if you need health care you're not working, and that's not true." She noted that state plans already cover very low-income residents who earn less than \$400 a month.

Hamacher said that individuals with up to \$20,800 in annual income would qualify for the health plan, with higher income ceilings for multi-person households.

State and federal programs already provide health care for Michigan children, and they would not be covered by the plan.

The health care proposal will cover doctor's visits, cancer screenings, X-rays and lab tests and provide prevention and prescription programs.

A similar initiative was approved by voters in Genesee County in 2006.

"In just a few short years, Genesee County went from covering less than 3 percent of the uninsured to more than 67 percent," Hamacher said.

"Emergency room visits to local hospitals dropped 38 percent and patients reported fewer health problems and a significant reduction in prescription drug costs. The success of the Genesee plan can happen right here in Bay County, once voters approve the initiative on Nov. 4."

The proposal is supported by the Saginaw Diocese Bishop Robert J. Carlson, Bay Health Plan Corp., Bay Regional Medical Center and the Helen M. Nickless Volunteer Clinic.



August 11, 2008

Free clinic offers extended evening hours, translation for Spanish speakers

The Enquirer

The Nursing Clinic of Battle Creek at 34 Green St. has extended its evening hours of operation in order to help working families who do not have adequate health insurance access free medical care.

Beginning today, the free clinic will be open until 8 p.m. on Monday and until 7 p.m. on Wednesday through September. No appointment is necessary. Call 962-6565 for more information.

Additionally, a Spanish-English medical translator will be available during the daytime hours and Wednesday evenings. The new service is a result of collaboration with the Latino/Hispanic Community Project.



August 10, 2008

Dems adopt goal of guaranteed health care

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH - Democrats shaped a set of principles Saturday that commits the party to guaranteed health care for all, heading off a potentially divisive debate and edging the party closer to the position of Barack Obama's defeated rival, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Obama, soon to be the Democratic nominee, has stopped short of proposing to mandate health coverage for all. He aims to achieve something close to universal coverage by making insurance more affordable and helping struggling families pay for it.

Advisers to Obama and Clinton both told the party's platform meeting they were happy with the compromise, adopted without opposition or without explanation as to how health care would be guaranteed.

In return for the guarantee, activists dropped a tougher platform amendment seeking a government-run, single-payer system and another amendment explicitly holding out Clinton's plan as the one to follow.

The party now declares itself "united behind a commitment that every American man, woman and child be guaranteed to have affordable, comprehensive health care."

Under any system in play, most people would still put out money for health insurance as they do now, but they would get help when needed.

That was a common feature of the plans put forward by Obama and Clinton in the primaries. But she would have required everyone to get insurance while his plan makes it mandatory only for children.

Democratic Party Chairman Howard Dean praised "the spirit of this compromise."

Party platforms are a statement of principles that are not binding on the candidates or the next president and they are typically given little attention after they are adopted.

OP-ED COLUMNIST

Can It Happen Here?

By **PAUL KRUGMAN**
The New York Times

Published: August 10, 2008

The draft Democratic Party platform that was sent out last week puts health care reform front and center. “If one thing came through in the platform hearings,” says the document, “it was that Democrats are united around a commitment to provide every American access to affordable, comprehensive health care.”



Paul Krugman

Can Democrats deliver on that commitment? In principle, it should be easy. In practice, supporters of health care reform, myself included, will be hanging on by their fingernails until legislation is actually passed.

What’s easy about guaranteed health care for all? For one thing, we know that it’s economically feasible: every wealthy country except the United States already has some form of guaranteed health care. The hazards Americans treat as facts of life — the risk of losing your insurance, the risk that you won’t be able to afford necessary care, the chance that you’ll be financially ruined by medical costs — would be considered unthinkable in any other advanced nation.

The politics of guaranteed care are also easy, at least in one sense: if the Democrats do manage to establish a system of universal coverage, the nation will love it.

I know that's not what everyone says; some pundits claim that the United States has a uniquely individualistic culture, and that Americans won't accept any system that makes health care a collective responsibility. Those who say this, however, seem to forget that we already have a program — you may have heard of it — called Medicare. It's a program that collects money from every worker's paycheck and uses it to pay the medical bills of everyone 65 and older. And it's immensely popular.

There's every reason to believe that a program that extends universal coverage to the nonelderly would soon become equally popular. Consider the case of Massachusetts, which passed a state-level plan for universal coverage two years ago.

The Massachusetts plan has come in for a lot of criticism. It includes individual mandates — that is, people are required to buy coverage, even if they'd prefer to take their chances. And its costs are running much higher than expected, mainly because it turns out that there were more people without insurance than anyone realized.

Yet recent polls show overwhelming support for the plan — support that has grown stronger since it went into effect, despite the new system's teething troubles. Once a system of universal health coverage exists, it seems, people want to keep it.

So why be nervous about the prospects for reform? Because it's hard to get universal care established in the first place. There are, I'd argue, three big hurdles.

First, the Democrats have to win the election — and win it by enough to face down Republicans, who are still, 42 years after Medicare went into operation, denouncing “socialized medicine.”

Second, they have to overcome the public's fear of change.

Some health care reformers wanted the Democrats to endorse a single-payer, Medicare-type system for all. On the sheer economic merits, they're right: single-payer would be more efficient than a system that preserves a role for private insurance companies.

But it's better to have an imperfect universal health care plan than none at all — and the only way to get a universal health care plan passed soon is to inoculate it against Harry-and-Louise-type claims that people will be forced into plans “designed by government bureaucrats.” So the Democratic platform emphasizes choice, declaring that Americans “should have the option of keeping the coverage they have or choosing from a wide array of health insurance plans, including many private health insurance options and a public plan.” We'll see if that's enough.

The final hurdle facing health care reform is the risk that the next president and Congress will lose focus. There will be many problems crying out for solutions, from a weak economy to foreign policy crises. It will be easy and tempting to put health care on the back burner for a bit — and then forget about it.

So I'm nervous. The history of the pursuit of universal health care in America is one of missed chances, of political opportunities frittered away. Let's hope that this time is different.

One more thing: if we do get real health care reform, a lot of people will owe a debt of gratitude to none other than John Edwards. When Mr. Edwards dropped out of the presidential race, I credited him with making universal health care a “possible dream for the next administration.” Mr. Edwards's political career is over — but perhaps he and his family can take some solace from the fact that his party is still trying to make that dream come true.

Cupboard nearly bare at Southwest Michigan food banks

Posted by [Rebecca Bakken | Kalamazoo Gazette](#)

August 09, 2008 15:05PM

KALAMAZOO -- Nonprofit food providers are seeing what they call a "perfect storm" as donations dwindle and the number of people in need rises during their busiest season of the year.

Statewide economic hardship combined with hungry children on vacation from schools, where some receive free or price-reduced meals, have left the cupboards of some food banks dangerously close to empty.

"The largest constituency of people in need are children. ... It's been especially tough this summer," said Bob Randels, executive director of the Food Bank of South Central Michigan in Battle Creek. "It's the emptiest it's ever been."

Randels said since 2007, the amount of food the agency distributes has gone up 10 percent, while donations have gone down 11 percent. As a result, the food bank has had to buy its own products with money from fundraisers.

Other than the stressed economy, Randels said the drop in donations could be attributed to high gas prices and poor farming weather. He said the food bank usually gets surplus produce from local farmers, but crops have not been good this season. He also said rising gas prices have made distributing food more expensive.

The food bank's main source of donations is the food industry. Randels said Kellogg's and Post are big donators.

He said about 25 percent of the food bank's donations come locally, from farmers and independent food drives.

He said the food bank distributes to 275 charities in eight counties and has a "special relationship" with Loaves and Fishes, a Kalamazoo-based food bank.

Anne Wend Lipsey, executive director of Loaves and Fishes, said the agency is serving an unprecedented number of people. Recently, she said the food bank received a request for 300 loaves of bread from a distributor and only had 100 loaves in stock.

"Our warehouse is working overtime," Lipsey said.

Loaves and Fishes takes calls Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. from people in need to discuss their eligibility. Lipsey said the agency directs callers to a distribution network, such as a church or community center, and let them know of any mobile pantries -- trucks filled with donations -- in their area.

The food bank sends mobile pantries to different areas at the end of each month. Lipsey said the agency tries to provide same-day response, but if that's not feasible, people are given information about meal programs in their area.

"We are actively engaged in seeking out resources. We rely on the support of the community to do that," said Lipsey, who noted that about 40 percent of Loaves and Fishes' supplies are donated. "People who are donors are experiencing rising food cost, so their ability to donate in significant ways can be challenged as well."

St. Vincent Catholic Charities celebrates 60th anniversary

BY MARY JO WHITE • LANSING COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS • AUGUST 10, 2008 • FROM GRAND LEDGE INDEPENDENT

LANSING TWP. - Lansing Township Supervisor John Daher and St. Vincent Catholic Charities on West Willow go way back.

At STVCC's 60th anniversary celebration Aug. 1, in fact, Daher said he grew up in Lansing's St. Casimir's Parish and knew assistant pastor Father John Slowey, whose brainchild St. Vincent's was.

"He was a social scientist and a man of great vision," Daher said. "I can't think of a more important landmark in the area ... that serves the needs of other people."

Today that landmark has grown to an organization with a \$10.5-million budget and a staff of about 200 who served over 7,800 people last year alone. It provides everything from foster care, adoption and refugee services to helping the homeless and the disabled.

It also runs the St. Vincent's Home for Children, a residential program for 40 children ages four to 17 in a new building opened in 2004. Kids who aren't making it in foster care come from all over Michigan's lower peninsula and find a home there. They're assessed, receive services and go to school.

Lansing mayor Virg Bernero and Jerome Marx representing Gov. Jennifer Granholm were also on hand for the festivities, each presenting STVCC CEO Andrea Seyka with a proclamation.

Lansing and Lansing Township have been sparring over many development issues lately, from a proposed sewer extension to possible consolidation of their fire departments. So Bernero, following Daher on the program, got a good laugh from the crowd with a great one-liner.

"I agree with everything John Daher said," Bernero said with a straight face.

Lansing Bishop Earl Boyea thanked STVCC staff for their dedication and hard work, then blessed a natural fence line of evergreen trees that separates STVCC from St.

Joseph's Cemetery next door and a memory garden tucked between two wings of the children's home. The natural fence honors two members of the Collar family of East Lansing who are buried nearby: Alonzo, known "Bonz," who died at age 21 and his grandmother, Elia Collar Stanley. The garden memorializes Anna McNeilly, the mother of Margaret Schiffer. Schiffer and her husband Dan have been long-time STVCC supporters.

Typical of those who came to celebrate were Bob and Marie Brown of Grand Ledge, who are committed to giving STVCC \$5,000 over five years. With money inherited from Bob's dad, the couple set up college funds for young family members, then turned to STVCC.

"This is about kids," Bob said. "It's local and you can see the money at work."

After lunch, a Dean Transportation bus took people on an eye-opening virtual tour of what children in foster care are likely to experience.

STVCC staff handed each of them a plastic garbage bag for all their possessions. Four notecards, each inscribed with an item so precious that it would be snatched up if one had to leave home suddenly, went in the bag.

The bus traveled a route from one foster home to another, with a trip to probate court sandwiched in. Staff reminded the bus riders that young children don't come to court. Instead, they have to wait to hear what the judge decrees about their future. So the bus waited for awhile on Kalamazoo Street in front of the Grady Porter building downtown.

During the journey, of course, all four note cards were taken away, then ripped in half so they couldn't be recovered - a symbol of what often happens to foster children's most precious relationships and possessions.

Back at STVCC, community relations and marketing director Julie Reynolds reminded everyone that there are about 18,000 children in foster care in Michigan right now, and 450 of them age out every year with no family to support them in the transition to adulthood.

Wonder what Father Slowey would do about that.



August 10, 2008

Poll finds wide support for budget-cutting ideas

Despite Michigan's continuing financial struggle, officials have yet to seriously consider implementing long-term structural changes that can help put state government on sound financial footing.

Let's hope a statewide survey released this past week by Detroit Renaissance will give them the political courage needed to begin moving forward on solid ideas that are bound to draw criticism from some quarters, but can realign Michigan's spending to better match its declining revenue.

The random telephone survey of 800 Michigan voters was conducted July 16-21 by Glengariff Group Inc. and commissioned by Detroit Renaissance, a private, nonprofit economic-growth organization.

People surveyed were presented with 12 ideas for reducing the state's long-term budget costs, and four of the ideas received majority support across all demographic groups, regardless of region, political party affiliation, union affiliation, ethnicity, age, income or gender.

Topping the list was finding ways to punish nonviolent offenders other than prison. A total of 79.3 percent of those polled - or nearly four out of five - seem to recognize that there must be better ways to deal with people convicted of nonviolent crimes than putting them behind bars. Greater use of alternative sentencing not only will help reduce Michigan's burgeoning corrections costs, but also is likely to help those convicted of relatively minor crimes to get their lives back on track.

Other ideas receiving widespread, across-the-board support were to increase premiums for state employee health care to bring them more in line with the private sector (supported by 74.5 percent); changing the retirement system for *new* teachers (74.1 percent support); and increasing deductibles/co-pays for state employee health care (72.5 percent support).

Two other ideas that had majority support statewide, although not among all demographic groups, were imposing small co-pays for Medicaid-related health services (63.3 percent support) and releasing some nonviolent offenders before parole (58.8 percent).

The least popular ideas put forward were making Medicaid eligibility more difficult (only 26.8 percent support); reducing Medicaid payments to hospitals/doctors (22.8 percent support); and reducing the pay and benefits of corrections employees (20.9 percent support).

The survey at least provides a direction for politicians to head in trying to reduce state spending. The results indicate that officials, while they might be targeted by specific interest groups for certain ideas, do not risk political suicide in trying to bring Michigan back to financial stability.

Numerous groups and advisory panels have emphasized the need for Michigan to make substantive structural changes in the way it does business.

Doing nothing is not an option, nor is waiting for the economy to "turn around." The economy - statewide, nationally and globally - is changing. Michigan government needs to change with it, so that it is in a good position to seize future economic opportunities.

The upcoming elections offer voters a chance to let political candidates know what changes they think state government should make.